

“CARIBBEAN DIASPORIC MARVELLOUS REALISM”

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ABSTRACT:

This chapter will analyse the significance of the ‘marvellous realism’ found in contemporary Caribbean literature, which has been written in English by diasporic authors. I will do this by applying postcolonial theory to a corpus of study that includes selected novels by David Chariandy, Nalo Hopkinson, Cyril Dabydeen and Kei Miller. These creative works accentuate how authors of Caribbean origin try to normalise the more fantastic elements of their respective cultures by utilising influences and imagery while resident in western lands. In order to explore this extrapolation of cultural elements, I will use Alejo Carpentier’s postulations around ‘marvellous realism’ to support the analysis of the folkloric supernatural phenomena. I will use my book *Diasporic Marvellous Realism: History, Identity and Memory* (2015) as a foundation and aim to update some of my working hypotheses. In addition, I will widen my referential framework while emphasising several defining characteristics of the textual representation of Caribbean transculturation. The Caribbean diaspora encompasses an amalgam of geographic, historical, social, and cultural issues, which showcase the impact of transterritorialisation and hybridity in contemporary literature. The books that will feature – *Soucouyant* (2007), *The Salt Roads* (2003), *Dark Swirl* (1988) and *The Last Warner Woman* (2010) – illustrate this evolution from ‘magical’ to ‘marvellous’ realism in first and second-generation Caribbean diasporic writing. The novels included in this corpus contemplate the myths and legends that have emanated from their respective author’s culture of origin. They highlight the significance of the social, political, and cultural ramifications of their Westernised depictions of the supernatural. These reinterpretations also imply a conducive change in the rhetorical gaze regarding the importance of cultural heritage as a form of resistance. They do so to emphasise the visibility of dispossessed communities within their host countries.

1.- An Introduction to Caribbean Diasporic Marvellous Realism

In a lecture delivered in 2008 at the University of Vigo (Spain),¹ the Canadian author of Caribbean origin David Chariandy tried to bridge the gap between his research interest in multiculturalism and his first published novel, *Soucouyant*,² a text inspired by the author's cultural and familial Caribbean background. The action of this debut novel takes place in Toronto and narrates the return home of a son to take care of a mother who has dementia and who, involuntarily, begins to reveal the disturbing family history that takes place in both Canada and Trinidad, the woman's country of origin. As the novel's subtitle indicates, *Soucouyant* is a novel of forgetting. The figure of the soucouyant appears in the first pages of the novel when Adele, the narrator's mother, assures him that she saw one of these supernatural beings when she was a child and was still living in Trinidad. This folkloric figure is described in the novel as follows: "something like a female vampire. She lives a reclusive but fairly ordinary life on the edge of town. She disguises herself by dressing up in the skin of an old woman, but at night she'll shed her disguise and travel across the sky as a ball of fire".³ The fact that the narrator uses a European reference, the vampire, to describe a folkloric figure more than characteristic of the Caribbean is significant. It suggests that the protagonist has somehow lost certain contact with his culture of origin.

Those readers who approach *Soucouyant* without previous specific knowledge of Caribbean folklore will find themselves in a similar situation to the narrator's and will not understand the magical dimension of the fantastic element that articulates the novel. This misunderstanding will happen unless they enter the game of not questioning the event that the novel narrates from a rational point of view. Although the text revolves around this mythical figure, in *Soucouyant*, the readers, like the narrator himself, do not need to know what a soucouyant is. During the crises caused by Adele's mental condition in Toronto, presented in the text visually through deconstructed handwriting, the protagonist reveals her trauma, a trauma that her son discovers after putting together the disjointed account that his mother tells of her childhood in Trinidad. Adele's dementia plays a fundamental role in the novel, given her tendency to remember traumatic aspects of her life that she believed had been forgotten. To put it another way, Adele forgets to forget. In fact, after giving voice to all the silences that exist in the family history, *Soucouyant* becomes a novel of remembering thanks to Adele's neurological disease. Her dementia makes her forget the more immediate past. However, it brings back a distant memory: the day when her mother, who worked as a prostitute for American soldiers, had gasoline poured over her and then was set on fire; she ran covered in flames through the military base at night. Adele's mother was the soucouyant she believes she saw when she was a child. The magical element that articulates the novel disappears at the very end of the story. The text reaches its climactic moment in which the narrator offers this rational explanation of what was hitherto a fantastic phenomenon. This narrative effect is what I call 'Caribbean Diasporic Marvellous Realism'.

2.- The Latin American Boom and its Context

Like much of the Caribbean literary production today, *Soucouyant* could not be understood without the Latin American Boom's vital influence on world literature.⁴ The Latin American

¹ <https://tv.uvigo.es/series/5b5b6d6e8f4208070b1090f5> (accessed 08 April 2022).

² David Chariandy, *Soucouyant*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007).

³ Chariandy, *Soucouyant*, 135.

⁴ There has been and continues to exist a deep reservation around postcolonial literary criticism in the academic world when approaching the Latin American Boom. In this regard, scholar Fernando Coronil (2000) points out that Latin America, as an object of study and source of knowledge in postcolonial issues, has been systematically

Boom is a movement that began in mid-twentieth century Latin America to question previous literary traditions, such as Modernism. It was a point of inflection for Latin American literary production due to its innovative approach to different narrative techniques such as ‘magical realism’ or ‘marvellous realism’, as will be here explained. Some of the most important authors of that time were, to name but some, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes. This chapter will focus on the particular case study of diasporic Caribbean literature as a paradigmatic example of this tendency to reinterpret the supernatural rationally. This tendency is what I coined as ‘Diasporic Marvellous Realism’ in my book *Diasporic Marvellous Realism: History, Identity and Memory in Caribbean Fiction*,⁵ drawing on Cuban author Alejo Carpentier’s postulations around ‘marvellous realism’. Carpentier explained his motivation for postulating his philosophy of *lo real maravilloso americano* in the prologue of his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo*, translated into English as *The Kingdom of this World*, a text that he wrote while travelling to Haiti after spending some time in Europe. Clearly inspired by European surrealism and other cultural movements of the time, Carpentier adopts the point of view of an outsider and refers to the Caribbean reality in the following terms:

A cada paso hallaba lo *real maravilloso*. Pero pensaba, además, que esa presencia y vigencia de lo real maravilloso no era privilegio único de Haití, sino patrimonio de la América entera, donde todavía no se ha terminado de establecer, por ejemplo, un recuento de cosmogonías. [I found the marvellous real with every step. But I also realized that the presence and vitality of the marvellous real was not a privilege unique to Haiti but the patrimony of all the Americas, where we have not yet established an inventory of our cosmogonies.]⁶

These two terms, magical realism and marvellous realism, relate to how fantastic elements represent marvellous phenomena rather than magical ones in contemporary fiction. Caribbean authors, especially those in the diaspora, have found a fruitful source of inspiration to shape their cultural fictions in the Latin American literary tradition. Well-known names such as Nalo Hopkinson (born in 1960 in Jamaica and currently based in the USA), Cyril Dabydeen (born in 1945 in Guyana and currently based in Canada), Kei Miller (born in 1978 in Jamaica and currently based in the USA) and, of course, David Chariandy (born in Canada in 1969 to Trinidadian parents) are notable examples of writers who highlight this trend. Focusing this chapter on Caribbean diasporic literature in English stems from the striking particularity of its literary tradition and the undoubted connection it had with the Latin American Boom from its very beginning through, among others, Alejo Carpentier. The motivation behind comparing Caribbean postcolonial literature in English and the Latin American Boom departs from the need to challenge the consideration of postcolonial studies as an eminently Anglophone discipline. Philosopher Walter Mignolo⁷ reflects on this lack of communication between the English-speaking postcolonial tradition and non-English-speaking cases, such as the Latin American one. He considers that the independence of most of the colonies once belonging to the British Empire and then becoming part of the Commonwealth was achieved chiefly through

excluded or marginalised from the debates and angular texts by scholars. Most studies that have established the foundations of postcolonial theory have focused on analysing the consequences of northern European imperialism on the Asian and African continents instead of considering these effects from a Latin American perspective.

⁵ María Alonso Alonso, *Diasporic Marvellous Realism: History, Identity and Memory in Caribbean Fiction* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015).

⁶ Translation of Carpentier’s prologue at <http://instruct.uwo.ca/english/785a/Prologue.html> (accessed 06 July 2022).

⁷ Walter Mignolo, “Occidentalización, imperialismo, globalización: herencias coloniales y teorías postcoloniales.” *Revista Iberoamericana*, vol. 61, no. 170-171 (1995): 27-40.

evolution, rather than revolution. Mignolo highlights this distinction between the independence of former British colonies and other postcolonial contexts, such as the Latin American one, as key to understand this lack of communication between interrelated disciplines. Drawing on this interdisciplinary approach, literary scholars Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh⁸ have pointed out that the Caribbean is today an abstract concept and no longer a specific geographical reference as literary production is carried out in the same way both inside and outside the region. In addition, they assert that Caribbean literature is intended for both a Caribbean and a foreign audience, a perspective that conditions the specific approaches to folkloric elements in individual texts. This understanding implies the acceptance of a change in the paradigm of cultural representation due to the significant handicap that transterritorialization carries with it. The transterritorialisation of authors, that is the fact that they live in a country different from their country of origin and, in many cases, they keep moving from one host nation to another one due to personal and/or professional reasons, implies certain detachment from their original culture.

Contemporary Caribbean literature is strongly influenced by Indigenous folklore and its reinterpretation from the diaspora, as Chariandy's *Soucouyant* illustrates. These texts, in many cases, take the form of political discourse in which the "co-existence of disparate ways of living and of seeing life contests boundaries, seamless unities and ethnic purities and can therefore co-exist only very uneasily with cultural nationalism".⁹ Therefore, contemporary Caribbean literature symbolises the attempt to represent the existing links between different cultures in contact with each other by implementing what Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortíz,¹⁰ in his well-known essay first published in 1940, calls 'transculturation'. These links resulted from an adaptation and transformation process unique to the Caribbean after the colonisation of the islands. Ortíz's anthropological concept of Caribbean transculturation implies a greater exploration of the literary world surrounding the Latin American Boom, creating a space inherent to the supernatural imagery of a specific territory. Furthermore, this new paradigm has led to a reconsideration of generalisations made by literary critics around narrative techniques used in cultural fiction, making reference to those texts that reflect on the customs, traditions and folklore of a specific community. I refer here to what, for critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha,¹¹ for example, constitutes the literary language of the emerging post-colonial world after the Latin American Boom.¹²

There are many reasons for establishing a comparative analysis of the complexity of the Latin American Boom and the Anglophone postcolonial literatures, which emerged from the English-speaking Caribbean and its diaspora. The Caribbean diaspora perfectly represents the transculturation mentioned above postulated by Ortíz, since emigration is an inherent characteristic of Caribbean history. The region's initial colonisation by different European empires resulted in the arrival of thousands of new inhabitants to the south and centre of the American continent, and continued with the consequences of the African slave trade. The implication is that slave traders forcefully transported millions of Africans to work in the plantations as slaves. Moreover, following the abolition of slavery, the plantation system

⁸ Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁹ Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 216.

¹⁰ Fernando Ortíz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002 [1940]).

¹¹ Homi Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-7.

¹² What Bhabha refers to as the literary language of the emerging postcolonial world is probably fuelled not only by internal pressure from subaltern communities in various literary traditions that have suffered centuries of oppression, but also by what literary critic Rory O'Bryen (2011) describes as the creation of a neoliberal vision of the world that implies another turn of the screw towards globalisation.

fostered by colonisation provoked the mass migration of workers of Indian origin through indentureship.¹³ After all these migratory flows toward the Caribbean islands, the twentieth century witnessed the mass migration of hundreds of thousands of citizens from the Caribbean to other countries, especially the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. This mass migration implies that the Caribbean is no longer a simple geographical point but a conceptual reference corresponding to scholar James Procter's¹⁴ definition of diaspora. That definition is that a diaspora is a concept that refers to physical movements but also implies a particular way of understanding the new world order and contemporary cultural representations. Therefore, it is necessary to consider a new paradigm to apply it to the analysis of works that show a clear interest in revisiting and reinterpreting folklore through cultural fictions that offer a marvellous dimension of the Caribbean.

Due to contemporary South American continental literary trends, research on magical realism and marvellous realism seems obsolete in current Latin American scholarly literature. Nevertheless, postcolonial literature in English still seems to be deeply inspired by these two styles/genres. It is also important, when considering this obsolescence, to remember that we cannot label every text with a supernatural event or a folkloric figure as an example of either magical realism or marvellous realism. Literary critics Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez¹⁵ observe a thought-provoking difference between those texts that include what they call 'moments of magical realism' in a generally realistic narrative and those classified as magical realistic. Focusing on the latter and in order to define these concepts, literary scholar Maggie Ann Bowers published a three-part classification of narrative techniques related to the Latin American Boom that can be useful as a point of departure to understand conceptual differences between these two phenomena:

magischer realismus or magic realism, which 'was coined in Germany in the 1920s [...] to capture the mystery of life behind the surface reality'; *lo real maravilloso americano* or marvellous realism, 'was introduced in Latin America during the 1940s as an expression of the mixture of realist and magical views of life'; and *realismo mágico* or magical realism that is applied 'to all narrative fiction that includes magical happenings in a realist matter-of-fact narrative.'¹⁶

Magical realism, a genre frequently linked to the previously referred Latin American Boom, freed authors from certain creative limitations by giving them the freedom to experiment with new narrative techniques. The term magical realism usually describes a narrative technique that attempts to represent intangible aspects of life through literature. Supernatural phenomena are an intrinsic part of the narrative and considered from within the fiction as something ordinary. Latin American readership shares a cultural code with these magical realistic fictions, making it easier for them to understand the context of these folkloric elements. For example, it seems plausible that in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (originally published in Spanish in 1967 as *Cien años de soledad*), by Gabriel García Márquez, the ghost

¹³ The hiring of Asian workers to work on Caribbean plantations is a practice known as 'indentureship', a highly complex form of contracts explained by demographers G.W. Roberts and J. Byrne in their study published in 1966. Indentureship began in the nineteenth century to alleviate the labour shortage in the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean in 1833. It was carried out through long-term and very precarious employment contracts that promised rewards that, in most cases, never materialised. Indo-Fijian historian Brij V. Lal (1996) believes that the number of signed indentured contracts reached around one million.

¹⁴ James Procter "Diaspora," in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 152.

¹⁵ Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez, *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

¹⁶ Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

of Prudencio Aguiar appears to José Arcadio Buendía or that Amaranta speaks with the very Death itself, who bears a surprising resemblance to Pilar Ternera. According to the shared cultural code, these events may be real, especially in literature. The readership, at least, even if they do not share that cultural code, must accept the game proposed by the author. A masterpiece like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would not work if the reader keeps questioning the fantastic elements found in the course of the narration.

However, the most relevant concept to understand the implications of Caribbean Diasporic Marvellous Realism is that of *lo real maravilloso americano*, or marvellous realism. As previously suggested, for Carpentier this concept represents the importance of divergent subjectivities that coincide in the same place and time during the Caribbean transculturation process.¹⁷ Marvellous realism differs from magical realism in that it represents the process of cultural transformation in the Caribbean. We can begin to partially understand this transformation when we see that the supernatural requires explanation before it can be understood by those who do not share the same cultural code. The supernatural causes surprise, amazement, and wonder in a marvellous realistic narrative, so it must be naturalised. *The Kingdom of this World*, the novel by Carpentier, is an excellent example of this process of defamiliarisation. The plot and how the author uses the prologue to explain his intention and the philosophy behind the motivation for writing this masterpiece make it an excellent example. It is, undoubtedly, one of the cornerstones of the Latin American Boom. For instance, when Mackandal is about to be burnt at the stake, Carpentier puts into practice what he understands by *lo real maravilloso Americano* by changing perspectives. In this particular chapter in which Mackandal faces execution, the narrator offers two different points of view: the view of the slaves and the view of the colonisers. Thus, Mackandal either survives the flames after turning into a butterfly or dies in the fire; it depends on the adopted point of view. Literary scholar Leonardo Padura Fuentes¹⁸ explains the antagonism between rationalism and magic in this particular case as follows:

visión realista (Mackandal atado, encendido y vociferante); visión mágica, a partir de que aúlla “conjuros desconocidos [...] (caen las ataduras y Mackandal vuela: se ha salvado); visión realista, que “muy pocos vieron”, de la muerte del líder (es devuelto a la hoguera y una llama ahoga su último grito); visión mágica, que fundamenta la promesa de Mackandal de permanecer en el Reino de este Mundo (la obra de los Altos Poderes de la Otra Orilla). [Realist view (Mackandal is tied, set on fire, and screaming); magical vision, from the moment he howls “unknown spells” [...] (Mackandal’s ties fall and he flies away: he is saved); realist view, that “very few saw”, when the leader dies (he is brought back to the fire and the flames draw his final cry); magical vision, in which Mackandal bases his promise of remaining in The Kingdom of This World (the result of the Higher Powers of the Other Shore)].¹⁹

¹⁷ For literary critic Alicia Larena, Carpentier’s postulations respond to the demands of an “sed exotista de algunas corrientes europeas con signos literarios que, aparentemente ficticios, son en verdad una parte importante de su propia sustancia cultural” [exotic thirst of some European fashions with literary signs that, apparently fictitious, are indeed an essential part of their cultural substance] (Larena, 1996, all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated). Undoubtedly, the Latin American Boom was favoured by a wave of nonconformity motivated by the need to reinterpret Latin American otherness as something positive, something that Alicia Larena calls ‘contraculturas de la identidad’ [identitarian counter-cultures]. That is a sense of transgression on the authors and readers to expand the limits of reason to fit within the realistic novel with different cosmologies that offer different worldviews.

¹⁸ Leonardo Padura Fuentes, *Un camino de medio siglo: Alejo Carpentier y la narrativa de lo real maravilloso* (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 2002).

¹⁹ Padura Fuentes, *Un camino de medio siglo*, 195.

These differing views and associated implications suggest a conflicting dichotomy between a rational worldview and a magical one. Carpentier's readership, in this case, whether of Caribbean origin or not, will not have to enter the game of believing or not believing in the anthropomorphic powers of Mackandal since magical realism disappears if the reader adopts the point of view of the French soldiers that assure that Mackandal died in the fire. However, Carpentier's readership can also decide to adopt the point of view of the slaves and assume the hero's survival is something real. The fact that the narrator offers two versions of the same event implies that magic, as understood through magical realism, does not exist. This understanding is made even more evident in the prologue accompanying the original Spanish version of *The Kingdom of this World*. Carpentier explains his philosophy around marvellous realism and in many other articles he published after his novel became a great success. He clarifies that his narrative technique goes beyond magical realism because he intends that the reader should not take magic and the supernatural for granted in his novel. For example, in works by García Márquez, Borges or Rulfo, magic is as natural as the narrative itself.

3.- Nalo Hopkinson's reinterpretation of Carpentier's Marvellous Realism

Inspired by Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*, *The Salt Roads*,²⁰ by Caribbean-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson, offers another intriguing approach to the influence of the Latin American Boom in postcolonial Caribbean literature in English and written from the diaspora. In the novel, the author rewrites the Haitian revolution through the figure of Mackandal. However, Hopkinson's representation is significant compared to Carpentier's version since, instead of focusing on male characters (Ti Noel, Mackandal, Henri Christophe or Boukman), the author adopts the point of view of female characters. Matant Mer, the shaman who accompanies Mackandal in both texts, is presented as an anti-heroine. This presentation is because, apart from not believing in war conflicts and opposing Mackandal's revolutionary strategies, she does not adopt the point of view of the slaves in the episode of the burning of the hero. At that moment, which appears at the end of the novel, Matant Mer prepares the narrative for her sceptical interpretation of Mackandal's death. During the journey in which French soldiers guide the man from the cage where he was imprisoned to the square where they will execute him, the slaves are (as it also happens in Carpentier's novel) gathered piously waiting for something to happen. Once in the square, the French soldiers tie Mackandal's body to a pole with chains; magic does not happen even though Matant Mer describes this through a realistic technique. It is after the different perspectives found in the text, between the magical point of view of the slaves and the scepticism of the shaman herself, that Matant Mer returns to a realistic narrative while questioning the miracle that the rest of the slaves claim to have witnessed: "I wanted to *believe* that Mackandal flew away, but my wishes can't fly freely so. They're rooted to the ground like me".²¹ The shaman wants to believe, but she cannot do so because of the imposition of logical reasoning. Therefore, although Hopkinson's narrative technique, in this case, is similar to that used by Carpentier, the author goes a step further in her sceptical interpretation of the episode of the stake. In this way, Carpentier's marvellous realistic narrative challenges magic and the supernatural by offering the realistic point of view of the French soldiers concerning Mackandal's death. In *The Salt Roads*, this tragic event becomes something much more significant since it is the shaman who offers this realistic point of view. The narrator herself seems in awe of the supernatural phenomenon that the slaves claim to have witnessed. However, she is still unable to accept it as possible, placing herself on the sceptical side that French soldiers occupy in *The Kingdom of this World*.

²⁰ Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads*, (New York: Warner Books, 2003).

²¹ Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads*, 349, my emphasis.

As it happens in this novel, the history of the Caribbean has always been an essential source of literary inspiration, especially when it comes to dealing with topics such as slavery or the slave trade. This interest materialises in another of Hopkinson's novels, *The New Moon's Arms*,²² as it does and many other pieces of Caribbean contemporary fiction (from Caryl Phillips's *The Final Passage* to Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women*, to name but two). *The New Moon's Arms* recovers the history of the millions of Africans transported by force across the Middle Passage, a route from the west coast of Africa to the Caribbean to work in the plantations run by the European colonisers on the islands. During the 1950s and 60s, the interpretation of historical discourse as a certain truth began to be questioned, along with any other product of human knowledge such as philosophy and literary criticism. This questioning, which arose mainly from the world of the arts and challenged any absolute truth, is known as Postmodernism. Its postulations have influenced other disciplines during the last decades. In his famous essay *The Invention of America*,²³ Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman highlights that historical discourses do not reflect a predetermined reality but rather constitute and produce our sense of reality. Fiction plays a paramount role, so it seems logical to question official history through literature by metatextual reconstructions of specific historical events with a literary discourse that challenges official records. However, history and fiction are human constructions and subject to different interpretations. Postcolonial literature focuses mainly on the events that have been ignored by traditional historicism as they have either been hidden or erased from official accounts. Consequently, we must imagine these events. Historical silences are significant to the point of offering additional connotations since silences open the door to the imagination of readers, who will have to discover the clues left by the authors throughout the text, as literary theorist Linda Hutcheon suggests in the following quote. She refers to her well-known concept of 'historiographical metafiction': "the terms *Postmodernism*, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional *and* historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past".²⁴

Hopkinson makes this reference in *The New Moon's Arms*, a work of speculative fiction, a genre in which the author goes beyond the simple recreation of history by opening the text to new possibilities of literary creation. The novel is an excellent example of how the Middle Passage, the previously mentioned journey that took African slaves across the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean, can be speculatively recreated. The middle-aged protagonist, Calamity Lambkin, lives in an imaginary Caribbean archipelago called Cayaba. One day, she finds a mysterious little boy unconscious on the beach; he is about three years of age. The child is taken to the hospital by ambulance. There they realise he has a series of physical peculiarities such as interdigital membranes between the fingers of his hands. The protagonist recalls a memory from her childhood when she was playing on the beach and found a similar creature; that creature lived in the sea with their whole family. The author recreates the history of the Caribbean using flashbacks to the protagonist's childhood combined with stories inspired by the history of the slave trade when a ship transported African slaves across the ocean to the Caribbean.

We can find some magical realism moments in the novel in these juxtaposed stories, quoting Di Iorio Sandín and Perez. The narrator, in these cases, adopts the point of view of the enslaved Africans. Focusing on the shaman who accompanies the Africans on this terrible journey, the narrator recreates the rebellion on board that ended up freeing these slaves as they were crossing the ocean in a slave ship. After Uhamiri, an aquatic spirit typically represented through the figure of a mermaid, frees the kidnapped slaves from their captors, the shaman is

²² Nalo Hopkinson, *The New Moon's Arms*, (New York: Warner Books, 2007).

²³ Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).

²⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, (London and New York, 1988), 3, emphasis in the original.

the one in charge of returning them to the shores of Africa. Suddenly the captain, who is the only one capable of responding to the riots, grabs his pistol and shoots the shaman, killing her just as she is jumping overboard along with the slaves. When she dies, the shaman cannot carry out her mission of guiding the Africans back home, and it is for this reason that these slaves manage to mutate into aquatic beings to make the Caribbean waters their new home. Hopkinson also offers two different points of view when speculating on the event that explains the existence of mermaids. This explanation articulates the whole novel. Within the context of speculative fiction and from a contemporary perspective, the conclusion, after the hospital examination of the boy from the beach, is that mermaids exist. However, they exist due to biological evolution; the phenomenon has nothing to do with magic. When the narrator adopts the contrary point of view, those enslaved Africans who were able to escape their fate during historical flashbacks to the Middle Passage, magic is the reason for the metamorphosis that Uhamiri caused in her people so that they could survive in the water. Either way, the novel suggests a group of mermaids inhabit the Caribbean waters.

The New Moon's Arms is a work of speculative fiction, which can be problematic as it transports the reader into a world that does not correspond to their sense of reality, so they will have to get into the game of believing the scenario the author proposes. Once this scenario is accepted, it recreates the same game offered by Carpentier in *The Kingdom of this World* of changing points of view by alternating magic and realism. The novel suggests a group of Black mermaids is living in the sea, a suggestion refuted by secondary characters such as doctors and police officers; this is significant as it challenges the rational understanding of the fate of those African slaves who fell into ocean waters during their boat journey to the Caribbean. Therefore, mermaids are not magical elements in the novel, but marvellous beings since, after opening the possibility of genetic evolution to adapt to the environment, the magic disappears in favour of a scientific explanation.

4.- The Importance of Dissimilar Points of View in Cyril Dabydeen's Fiction

The history of the Caribbean has also conditioned the power dynamic between Europeans, Indigenous communities, enslaved African, and Indian workers who went to the islands after the abolition of slavery, making this area a truly diverse region. An excellent example of this transculturation and the influence of the Latin American Boom in its literary tradition is Guyana; a continental country also considered to be part of the Caribbean. In order to become familiar with Guyanese marvellous realism, it is necessary to read the works by Pauline Melville, a mixed-race author born in Guyana but living in London. In an article published in 2013,²⁵ the author talks about an empty space that she found in the National Museum of Guyana reserved for the spirits of the nation, or what is the same, a space for magic. For Melville, who has a strong link to her Western imagination, this empty space is a source of literary inspiration. Like the Western reader, Melville becomes the 'other', understanding this term in the sense given by philosopher Edward Said in his foundational text *Orientalism*.²⁶ Postcolonial literature in general, and Guyanese in particular, illustrates the ideal behind Carpentier's marvellous realism, as postcolonial scholar Arun P. Mukherjee suggests by stating that

[t]he outsider borrows under the suppressions of the dominant version of history and myth and brings out their ambivalences and disjunctions. The other, thus, serves as a measuring rod against which a culture can take stock of itself. He serves as a mirror where a culture may see itself outlined as others see it. For cultural traits are

²⁵ Pauline Melville, "Guyanese Literature, Magic Realism and the South American Connection," *Wasafiri*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2013): 7-11.

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 1995 [1978]).

inconspicuous to the members of a culture who remain oblivious to the dangers of ethnocentrism. If nothing else, the outsider can make a culture self-conscious, and that in itself is a great achievement.²⁷

According to this, marvellous realism represents a transcultural identity that arose from a complex process in a constant transformation that conflicts with one's subaltern consciousness, as literary theorist Gayatri C. Spivak postulates.²⁸ Postcolonial authors, including those of Guyanese origin, represent this subaltern consciousness. Guyana is considered a place dominated by this postcolonial exotic, as postcolonial scholar Graham Huggan²⁹ could call it, which refers to the reification of cultural differences by the publishing world.³⁰ For example, the work of Guyana-born Canada-based author Cyril Dabydeen *Dark Swirl*³¹ could also fall into this classification of a Caribbean diasporic marvellous realistic novel. Dabydeen, as Hopkinson, also seems inspired by Carpentier by offering different points of view in the course of the narration when it comes to representing Caribbean folklore. In this novel, marvellous realism appears thanks to the figure of the masscouraman. It represents the problems of adaptation of foreigners to a host culture dominated by a series of supernatural elements that differ from the imagery of the culture of origin, increasing the gap between magic and realism. The beautiful descriptions in the text, reminiscent of the Latin American Indian neo-Baroque that so fascinated Carpentier, arise from the cross-cultural exchange between Western and non-Western epistemology.

Dark Swirl is the story of an unnamed British biologist who travels to Guyana in the early twentieth century to find the masscouraman, a terrifying aquatic animal believed to inhabit lakes and rivers. The so-called 'white man' comes to a small town following rumours that a boy, Josh, has seen the masscouraman emerging from the river's waters next to the town. From the first pages of the novel, the biologist is described as the 'other', creating a curious change in perspective from which marvellous realism emerges in the text. By alternating the viewpoint between the villagers and the biologist, the narrative suggests yet also denies the masscouraman's possible existence. When someone begins to believe in the existence of this creature, another person loses their faith in this possibility. The narrator constructs these contradictions in the text through the use of dreams, visions caused by fever, and blurred images, which create a sense of uncertainty.

Contrary to what one might expect, there is a clear evolution when considering how the narrator tries to empower the characters. After being depicted as primitive and ignorant because of the biologist's perception, the question of agency and subalternity concerning the villagers changes significantly as the narrative progresses. The villagers are empowered but the biologist goes mad, and so this exchange erases the pre-established boundaries between the centre and the periphery in this dichotomous model. The novel's open ending, which implies the disappearance of the biologist and the consequent tranquillity in the village, leaves the reader wondering what happened, since, at first, everyone seemed to believe without a doubt in the

²⁷ Arun P. Mukherjee, "The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: Two Responses to Otherness," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1985): 58-59.

²⁸ The term 'subalternity' arises from the meaning given to it by Gayatri C. Spivak, who in 1988 published one of the most crucial works of postcolonial literary criticism together with her Subaltern Studies Group to analyse the representation of human subjectivity in different contexts. Initially, the subordinate subject was one below the colonial elite on the hierarchical scale. For more information, see Spivak 1988a and 1988b.

²⁹ Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

³⁰ According to Huggan, it was during the second half of the last century in Latin America and the first decades of this new millennium in the Anglophone postcolonial world when the publishing industry has benefitted from the success of magical realism as a cultural product. This 'post-colonial exotic', as he names it, has favoured a conception of the exotic as a marketing technique.

³¹ Cyril Dabydeen, *Dark Swirl*, (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1988).

existence of the massacouraman. The biologist travelled to the area as he believed there was a possibility of finding a new species that he would be able to classify scientifically. The villagers also believed in the rumours about the existence of this aquatic creature. Despite this, at the end of *Dark Swirl*, it seems clear that the massacouraman exists only in the disturbed mind of the biologist, and thus, even the villagers lose faith in its existence. Guyana is also described in the novel as a place constantly evolving, both physically and metaphorically, due to the bidirectional diasporic movements that reshape its cross-cultural identity. The massacouraman serves to examine the changes that occur in the perception of the inhabitants of the village about the new world-order that still bears particular reminiscences of colonial times. As an example of literature written by and about descendants of Indian workers in the Caribbean exposed to external European influences, *Dark Swirl* represents a clear case of subversion. It achieves this through a narration that changes perspectives to question colonial rhetoric. Additionally, the novel also considers the changing of hierarchies in power relations during the centuries of colonisation, which forms the basis of the subaltern Caribbean identity.

5.- Rational vs Non-Rational Worldviews in Kei Miller's Novel

Another good example of a Caribbean novel influenced by Caribbean diasporic marvellous realism is *The Last Warner Woman*³², by the diasporic Jamaican author Kei Miller. *The Last Warner Woman* has interesting parallels through the recreating of memory with *Soucouyant* by Chariandy. Miller was born in Jamaica, but in 2006, at the age of twenty-six, he left the island for the United Kingdom to complete a postgraduate degree at the University of Manchester. After some further study in the United States, Miller finished his PhD at the University of Glasgow and worked for a few years at the University of Exeter, in the south of England, before moving back to the United States. During these years, he frequently travelled to Jamaica for family and professional reasons, keeping close ties to the Caribbean. *The Last Warner Woman* is the story of a shaman who, like the author, left Jamaica to settle in England, in this case, after the Second World War. The protagonist is one of the people belonging to the so-called Windrush Generation.³³ The novel tells how manipulation of memory can serve as a defence strategy against the traumas that condition our lives. Because of the tragic historical events that marked both its colonial and postcolonial periods, the Caribbean became a place of interest for literary criticism, focussed on studying the many ways in which literature represents traumatic events. The theory of trauma underpins these studies, and is a very common methodological approach in postcolonial criticism, as pointed out by literary critic Justin D. Edwards,³⁴ through a focus on characters haunted by ghosts from the past. As in Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant*, memories of the past return to the present to evoke a painful experience that the protagonists have not overcome. Therefore, these ghostly elements of the narration, which normally appear in the text in the form of supernatural or folkloric figures, should be considered cultural 'loads' inherited from the past and shared by an entire community. Folklore, in this sense, represents what literary scholar Kathleen Brogan defines as "stories of cultural haunting"³⁵ since it is possible to pass on trauma from one generation to another.

³² Kei Miller, *The Last Warner Woman*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010).

³³ Many Caribbean immigrants arrived in the United Kingdom after World War II, invited by the British government, which in 1948 granted citizenship to all those people from the Commonwealth who were going to cover the lack of labour force caused by the loss of human lives during the war. That same year, a ship called the SS Empire Windrush docked off British shores with nearly five hundred Jamaican immigrants. These people are known as the 'Windrush Generation'.

³⁴ Justin D. Edwards, *Postcolonial Literature, A Reader's guide to essential criticism*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008).

³⁵ Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 6.

As in *Soucouyant*, *The Last Warner Woman* is a novel that recreates the story of intergenerational trauma. The plot revolves around a son who can reconstruct the family past thanks to his mother's stories, kept in her memory. However, the reconstruction of historical memory through literature is conditioned here by the forced oblivion of the protagonist, the Jamaican shaman, Adamine Bustamante. She is sent to an asylum for the insane in England after being diagnosed as a lunatic. Someone she calls Mr Writer Man rescues her from this institutional confinement some years later when she is an old woman and invites her to stay with him in his house. Mr Writer Man tells her that he is working on a novel and that her life will be a source of inspiration for him. Creative writing, therefore, is the inducer of all the memories that will begin to return to the woman's mind. Despite this, the reader will discover towards the end of the novel that Mr Writer Man is the son of Adamine. She gave birth to him after being repeatedly abused by the gardener who used to work in the mental institution to which she was committed shortly after arriving in England, which explains Mr Writer Man's interest in Adamine. It also explains the narrator's inclusion throughout the text of a series of intertextual references to events in both England and Jamaica.

Mr Writer Man wants to know what happened to the mother who, he thinks, gave him up for adoption. Thanks to the contribution of some official documents recreated in the novel, the reader discovers that Adamine was a reputable shaman in Jamaica. However, in England, her powers served as proof of her insanity. Jamaica accepts Shamanic powers as natural, but in England, science is unable to classify these as rational. Therefore, Adamine is labelled a lunatic and locked in an asylum where she suffers physical and psychological punishment every time she tries to use her powers. As a result, the woman learns to keep her powers to herself and even deny them. It may seem that Adamine stops believing in her ability as a shaman since she shows the most rational behaviour when following the code imposed on her by the confining institution. The truth is that she is trying to suppress her belief in the supernatural to avoid punishment. Mr Writer Man recreates the memories of young Adamine through the novel that he is writing; therefore, we can expect some poetic license. The significant consideration for the analysis of the presence of Caribbean diasporic marvellous realism in the novel is to realise that there are again two versions related to the shamanic powers of Adamine. Firstly, a magical one in which the assumption is that these powers are natural, and secondly, a wonderful one in which they try to be naturalised. For Adamine, her status as an immigrant, a diasporic subject, is a forced metamorphosis because her Caribbean cultural identity does not fit the standards of what is considered correct from a social point of view in her day-to-day life in England. She is labelled insane for this reason. In Adamine's world, cultural difference is not only rejected but also punished. There is no place for shamans in a rational world, which is a lesson that the protagonist learns after her confinement in a mental institution. As for many other immigrants, the only option is for her to renounce her cultural identity and dissolve into the dominant culture to go unnoticed.

6.- A Conclusion to Caribbean Diasporic Marvellous Realism

After analysing these texts, it seems evident that the juxtaposition of points of view between the magical and the rational is used recurrently in contemporary Caribbean literature in English, above all that written by diasporic authors. The impossibility of believing in the anthropomorphic powers of Mackandal, the reluctance to accept as authentic the physical mutations induced by an African goddess, the denial of aquatic monsters along with shamanic powers, are a consequence of the transculturation process suffered by authors; especially authors who have emigrated outside the islands. Diaspora represents another turn of the screw towards cultural homogenisation since the dominant culture seems to prevail, although the substratum of the culture of origin never disappears. Narrative philosophies and techniques

such as magical realism or *lo real maravilloso americano* seem to have become obsolete in current Latin American literature due to new literary trends that have left aside this fashion. However, various narrative techniques inspired by the Latin American Boom are still present in a significant way in other literary traditions. This presence is the case generally in postcolonial literature, particularly Anglophone Caribbean literature. As shown throughout the analysis of the texts mentioned above, Caribbean diasporic marvellous realism helps authors offer two perspectives thanks to its hybrid nature. Thus, there is a challenge to the dominant culture by the fantastic dimension offered by the subaltern cultural system and vice versa.

Caribbean diasporic marvellous realism also helps disempowered communities to fill existing historical silences in the official version of events of the past. Even the new generation of Caribbean authors, represented here by diasporic authors Chariandy, Hopkinson, Dabydeen or Miller, uses the Latin American Boom legacy to reinterpret their culture or origin in Western terms. The novels used here as an illustration of how Caribbean diasporic marvellous realism works offer a choral discourse through which authors adopt, in most cases, a Western perspective. The perspective is induced by the existing dichotomy between believing and non-believing, even when these discourses focus on non-Western experiences. This dominance is because contemporary authors cannot avoid being conditioned by a kind of transnational subjectivity. These authors maintain an apparent distance between a cultural system (that of their places of origin) and their host countries (to which they adapt their folklore). These texts are subject to historical censorship and sociocultural problems that manifest as traumas in the shape of rhetorical devices. The supernatural becomes a tool to get closer to the history of a community, the Caribbean, in this particular case study. This tool enables reconciliation with a past that haunts them because of the imposed silences by previous generations. Generations that, as narrated in literary fiction, have tried to forget or hide a variety of traumatic experiences.

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